



[Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804 - 1872](#)

## Ludwig Feuerbach

Frederick Engels' "[Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy](#)" was written when he was 66 years old, three years after the death of his close comrade Karl Marx. It is a retrospective assessment in four short, powerful parts, for publication in a magazine called *Die Neue Zeit*. We considered the first part, headed "Hegel", in a previous post in this CU series on "Philosophy and Religion". To save time, we skip the parts headed "[Materialism](#)" and "[Feuerbach](#)", though they are good and useful. The concluding and summarising part of "Ludwig Feuerbach" is headed "Marx" (attached, now as part of the full set; download linked below).

### **Necessity of struggle in philosophy**

Let us now look at the question of philosophy's relation to revolution.

In “Ludwig Feuerbach”, Engels is saying that prior to each great revolution of the past there had been a period of catastrophic ferment in philosophy. He comes close to saying that a conscious, public break-up of the pre-existing philosophy is a necessary condition for revolution. At any rate, this was historically the case in France prior to the Great French Revolution, and in Germany prior to the upheavals of 1848 that established the modern world’s politics of Bourgeois, Proletarians and Communists.

Engels is saying that it was the thorough breaking-up of the philosophical soil that allowed these two great revolutions to put down permanent roots.

Later on in our CU series on Philosophy and Religion we will read an argument that says that in the case of the Great October proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917, the philosophical ground had not been sufficiently prepared, and that is why the Russian revolution developed the way it did, and why the USSR eventually collapsed in the way that it did, at the end of the 1980s, just prior to South Africa’s democratic breakthrough.

This in turn raises the question of whether it will be possible to have any further revolutionary advance in South Africa, or anywhere else, let alone any final and permanent revolution, without a thorough breaking-up of the philosophical ground upon which we stand today, ground which has hardly been disturbed since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Assuming that we agree that this could be the case, then we would need to ask, first, how to take stock of the received philosophical legacy, including its revolutionary component? And

then, having discovered and delineated the frontier from which we will have to depart, to make out a line of march and begin a campaign. We will attempt to do this as the series develops, up to its tenth part.

For now, let us begin to draft a provisional outline of the principal sources of philosophy that would form part of such an assessment, plan and campaign. It could include the following, taken in chronological order:

1. The historical legacy in philosophy, e.g. [Aristotle](#), Alberti, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza
2. Hegel's works, especially "Logic" and the "Philosophy of Right"
3. Explicitly philosophical unpublished and published writings of Marx and Engels in the 1840s, during the multiple struggles of the "Old Hegelians", "Young Hegelians", Schelling, Feuerbach, Stirner, Bauer, Proudhon *et cetera*
4. The remainder of Marx's work, which, though not directly philosophical, contains constant implicit and tacit philosophical determinations
5. Engels' late work on philosophy including "Anti-Dühring", "Ludwig Feuerbach", and certain other short writings
6. Lenin's philosophical grounding, especially as it comes out in "[The State and Revolution](#)"
7. Critical reflections on the philosophy contained in the revolutionary "classics", by writers such as Christopher Caudwell, Evald Ilyenkov, Cyril Smith and James Heartfield
8. Forward-looking revolutionary philosophy that corresponds

with developments in science, taking for an example the late South African revolutionary Ron Press's "New Tools for Marxists"

To all of this we will have to add a sensitive and wide-ranging assessment of the *de facto* philosophy or world-outlook of our South African society today, in its abstract parts and in its concrete whole. This will be in the nature of active research, because as we find, so we will have to engage.

### **Religious Struggle Not Now So Necessary**

Religion was historically crucial in the case of the 1848 revolutions, as Engels shows. Religion had become the vehicle or the proxy whereby the revolutionary elements of the bourgeoisie expressed themselves, and articulated their struggles intellectually, even though these struggles had a material basis and a basis in class struggle.

In the linked extract from his "Ludwig Feuerbach" Engels describes the movement in religion in marvellous, masterful, sweeping paragraphs. Please, read it, comrades. Nothing I say can improve it, and it does not need shortening because it is already short, tight, concentrated and clear.

It is not the case that religion necessarily plays the same role today in South Africa, as it did then in Germany. On the contrary, religious formations are a strong part of the National Democratic Revolution. The liberation theologians are our allies.

Worldwide, and as a rule, religion has long since reconciled itself with science such as the discoveries of Charles Darwin, for

example, which had to do with the evolution of species, including humans. “Materialism” has won, in that sense. Atheism was never an issue for Marx and hardly an issue for Marxists in general, and Feuerbach was religious, even if materialist. There are no texts to be found among the Marxist “classics” that preach atheism as such.

Thus, though the moment when Ludwig Feuerbach (see his image, above) published his book “[Essence of Christianity](#)” in 1841 was for Engels a defining one, yet the place of religion today is not the same as was the place of religion then, and so Feuerbach’s “materialism” does not now have the force or the purpose that it had, for a short time, in Engels’ youth. Feuerbach and his “materialism” had their moment, and it was a short moment. What matters now is freedom, agency, and the ability to decide. What matters is: *Power, to the People!*

In 1843 Karl Marx wrote: *“For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism.”* Completed, indeed; and so it is with us today. We may thus conclude that we have no business making war on religion; and we will come back to this point soon, with Lenin.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 4, Marx, 1886](#).
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